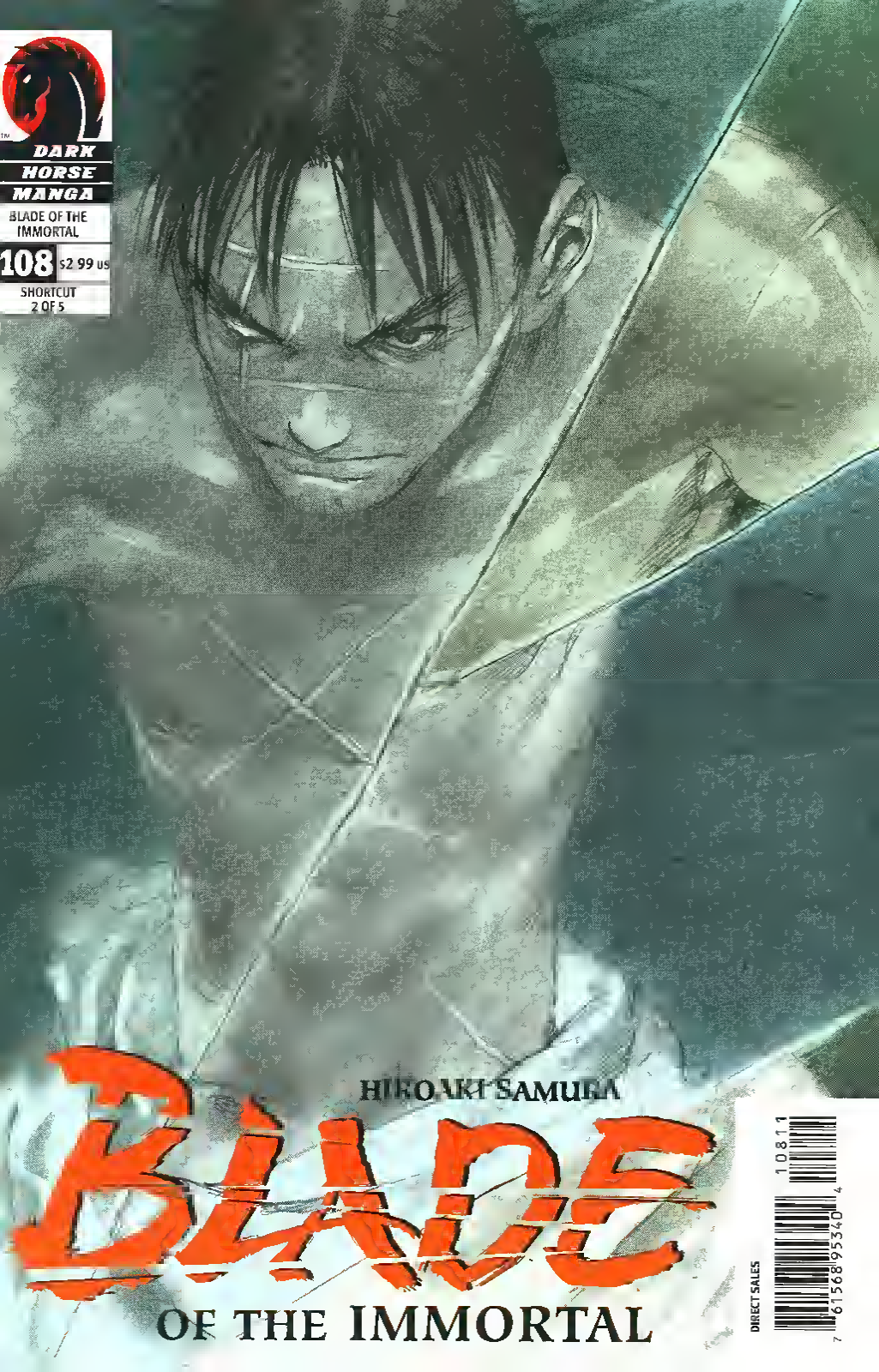
DARK
HORSE
MANGA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
108
$2.99 US
SHORTCUT
2 OF 5
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

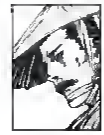
HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
cover colors by **DAN JACKSON**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge.

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dojō* destroyed by the Itto-*ryū*.



HABAKI KAGIMURA
Powerful *bangashira* serving the Shogun and seeking the secret of immortality.

HYAKURIN
Mugai *ryū* assassin recovering from torture at the hands of Itto *ryū* renegades.

MŌZEN
Older, more traditional medical examiner working for Kagimura.

BURANDO
Deranged medical examiner saved from prison by Kagimura.

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

After sparring with Gichi, Manji agrees to meet the deceptive Kagimura at a *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle, where Manji is ambushed, overwhelmed, and captured. Kagimura assigns two medical examiners the task of discovering the secrets of the *kessen-chu*, using Manji's body as their unwilling shortcut to immortality. Meanwhile, Hyakurin discovers that the Mugai-*ryū* has been disbanded.

designer **DEBRA BAILEY** editorial intern **MATT PYON**
editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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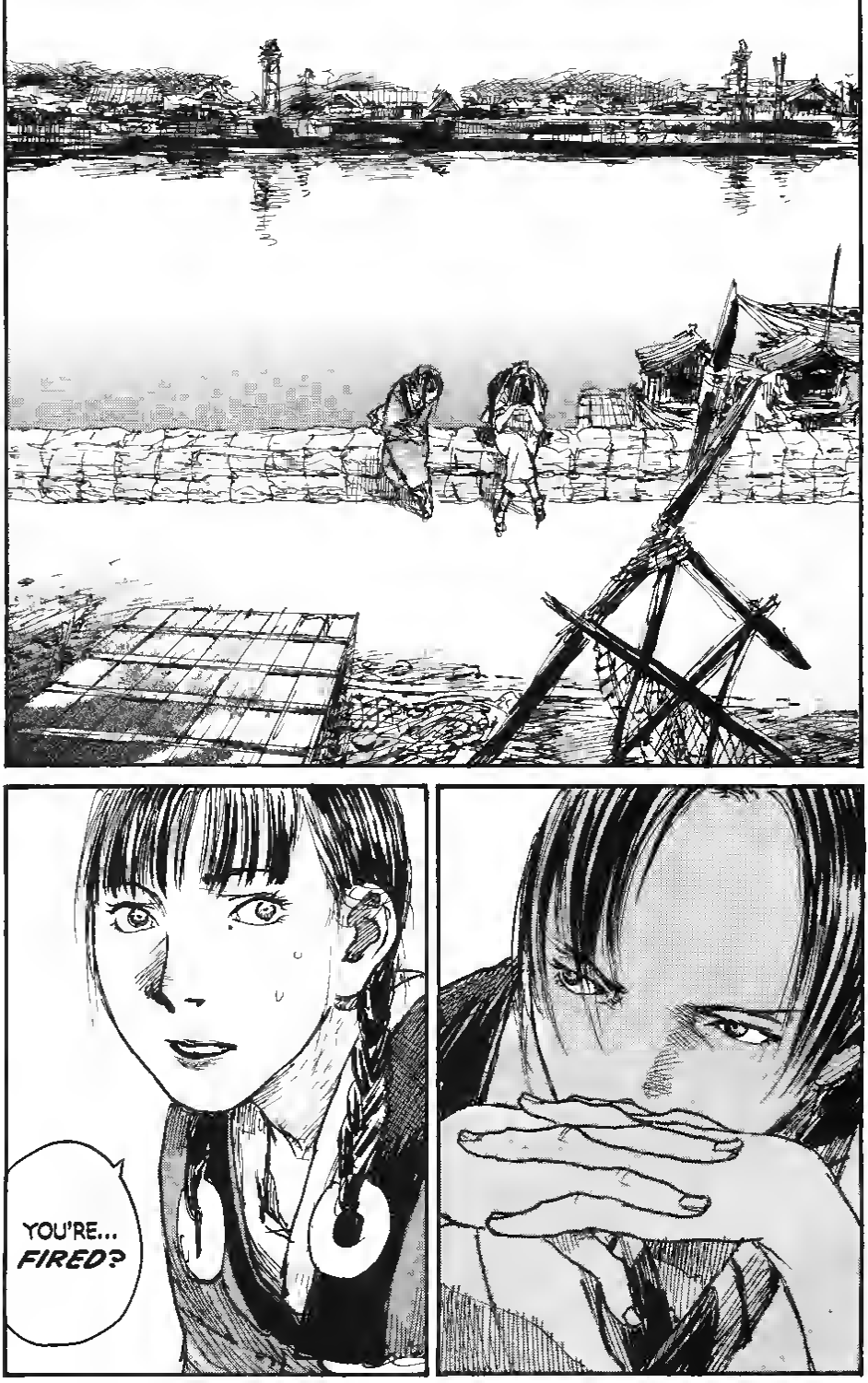
無限の住人

SHORTCUT

-part two-

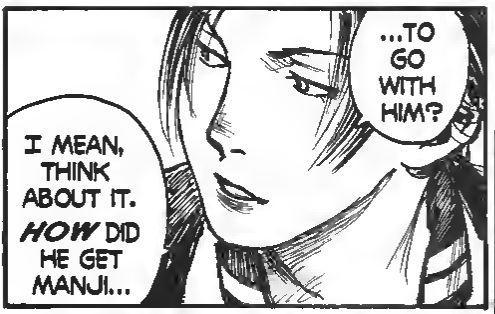

YOU'RE...
FIRED?

.....
.....
.....
.....
HO, HO.
RIN, RIN! YOU MAY BE AN INNOCENT, BUT YOU STILL GOTTA WATCH YOUR TONGUE!
OH HOH HOH HOH!
I--! I'M SORRY!
...
THIS... IS A PAIN.
SORRY, HON. I SHOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN IT OUT ON YOU.
YOU KNOW...
...I THOUGHT I WAS GETTING A LOT OF TIME OFF SINCE I HURT MY ARM.
SO SHE WAS WOUNDED?
BUT ON TOP OF THAT, SHUTTING DOWN THE MUGAI-RYŪ...?

THIS DOESN'T GO DOWN WELL.
NOT AT ALL.
RIN, SWEETY... I'LL LET YOU IN ON SOME-THING.
THIS MUGAI-RYŪ OF OURS?
WELL, IT'S LIKE...
FOR EXAMPLE. IT'S LIKE... WE ALL RAN UP DEBTS WITH THE SHŌGUNATE, DEBTS WE COULDN'T PAY OFF.
THEN WE WERE SORTA, WORKING THEM OFF.
THAT'S THE KIND OF OUTFIT WE WERE, TO MAKE IT SIMPLE.
BUT AS OF NOW... RIGHT NOW?
ONLY ONE OF US HAS EVER PAID OUT.
GIICHI.
JUST HIM.

AND THEY STILL LET YOU GO? JUST SHUT IT ALL DOWN...?
I DON'T KNOW. I HAVE A FEELING, LIKE...
...SOMETHING CAME UP. SOMETHING *SO BIG* THEY DIDN'T MIND DROPPING YOU.
YOU'RE *SHARP*, GIRL.
I FEEL IT, TOO...
...AND I'LL BET MONEY ON *THIS ONE.*
YOUR MISSING *MANJI* IS PART OF IT.

RIGHT, THEN!
FIRST, WE FIND GIICHI.

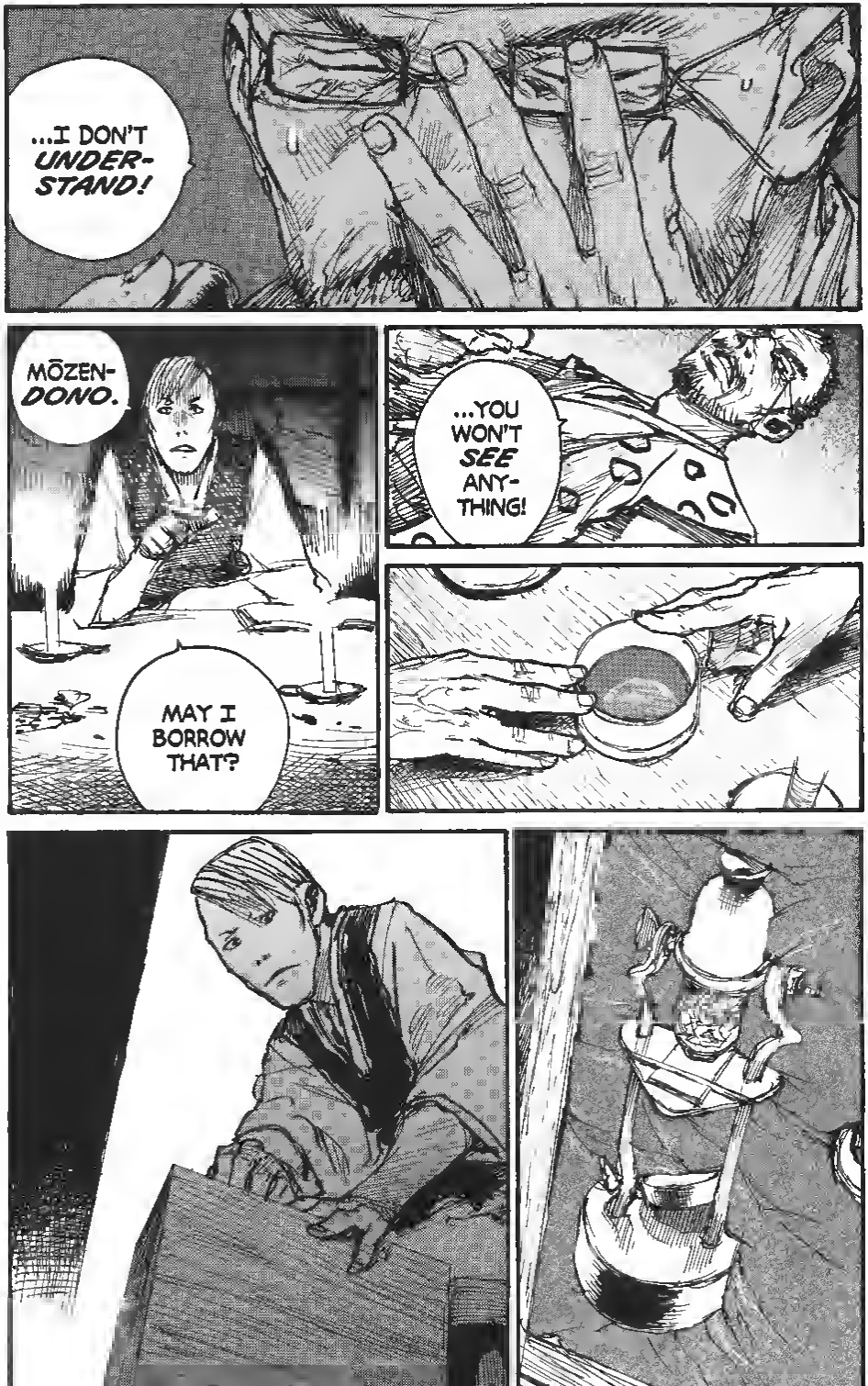

...TO GO WITH HIM?
I MEAN, THINK ABOUT IT. HOW DID HE GET MANJI...

WHAT DID HABAKI ASK FOR WHEN WE WENT TO MEET HIM?
GIICHI'S NEVER BREATHED A WORD ABOUT IT.

AND WHEN THAT BASTARD WON'T TELL ME ABOUT A JOB...
...IT MEANS HE THINKS IT'S BETTER FOR ME NOT TO KNOW.

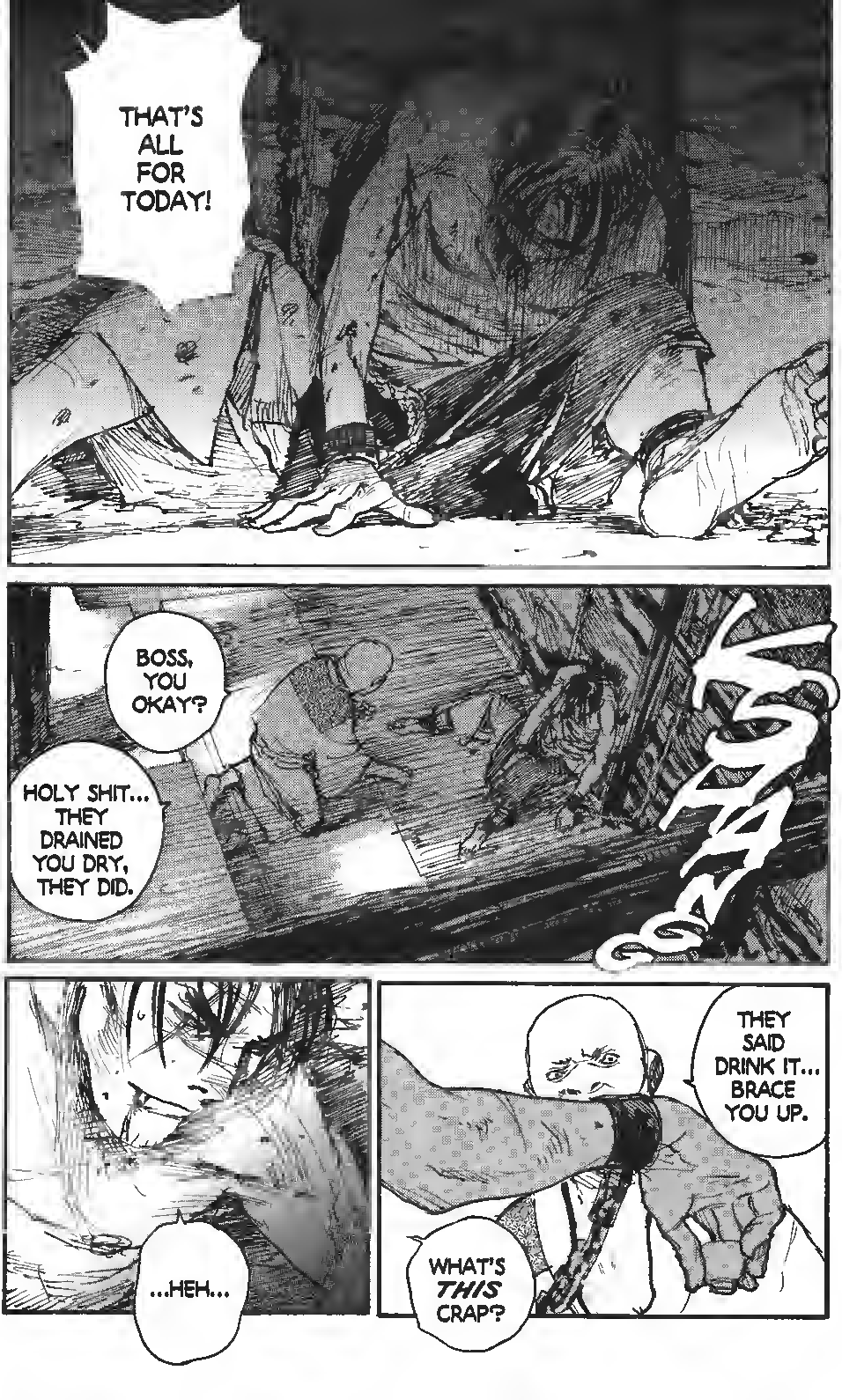
EVEN THOUGH HE KNOWS IT DRIVES ME CRAZY!

157, THE THIRD.
157, THE THIRD...
.....
.....
.....


...I DON'T UNDER-STAND!
MŌZEN-DONO.
MAY I BORROW THAT?
...YOU WON'T SEE ANY-THING!

WHAT--?
WHAT'S THAT, BURANDO?!
PLEASE. PAY ME NO MIND.
JUST A CRUDE TOY I MADE.
.....
.....
.....
DAY TWO...
...BUT CAN'T YOU FIND SOMEONE WHOSE HANDS DON'T SHAKE?!
YOU WANT MY BLOOD, YOU CAN HAVE MY FRIGGIN' BLOOD...

TRY DRINKING THIS.
DEWANO-SUKE, WAS IT?
YOU'RE *WASTING YOUR TIME!*
IT'S SKIMMED OFF HIS BLOOD?
UHH... DON'T TELL ME...
SHUT YOUR *MOUTH*, SCUM!
BUT HE'S *RIGHT.*

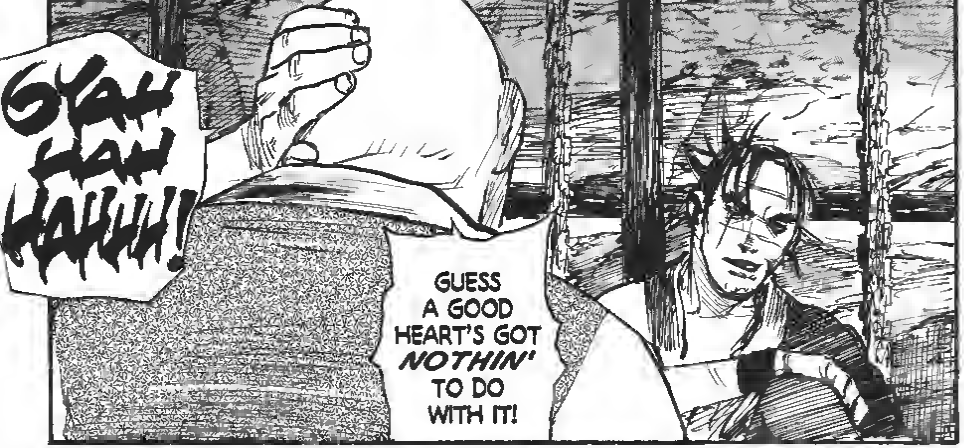

THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY!
BOSS, YOU OKAY?
HOLY SHIT... THEY DRAINED YOU DRY, THEY DID.
KSHANG
...HEH...
WHAT'S THIS CRAP?
THEY SAID DRINK IT... BRACE YOU UP.

OPIUM AND SENSO, THEY SAID.
WHAT'S SENSO, BOSS?
TOAD OIL... GAMA NO ABURA.
YOU'RE SHITTING ME! YOU'RE JUST A THIEF?! YOU LOOK LIKE A MASS-MURDERER.
NAW, NOT ME. STRICTLY SMALL-TIME. JUST A THIEF AND ARSONIST.
CAME T' EDO LOOKIN' FOR WORK, BUT I PICKED UP SOME BAD HABITS.
THEY CHUCKED ME OUTTA TOWN, BUT I CAME BACK, TRIED IT AGAIN...
...AND NOW LOOK AT ME. HEH HEH HEH!
BUT...
...LADY LUCK AIN'T DUMPED ME YET! NO, SIR! I GOT TO MEET A GUY LIKE YOU, BOSS.

HUHHH?! LUCK?! LIKE, YOU THINK YOU'RE GONNA GET OUT OF THIS MOLDY PIT ALIVE?! YOU CALL THAT LUCK?
YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, TOO. AT FIRST.
DON'T DRAG IT OUT, RIGHT? JUST WHACK OFF MY NOGGIN' AND BE DONE WITH IT.
UNTIL TWO DAYS AGO, THAT IS.
TURNED HEAVEN ON ITS HEAD, YEP.
YEAH?
WITH A BODY LIKE YOURS, LIFE'D BE EASY BACK ON THE FARM--
STOP, STOP!! BACK ON THE FARM? TO DO WHAT? WRESTLE WITH BEARS?
I GOT EDO IN MY BLOOD. CAN'T SHAKE IT.
HUH? NOT ME. NAW.
I MEAN MY OLD LADY.

THAT GUY HABAKI WHO DRAGGED ME HERE...?
WANNA KNOW WHAT HE TOLD ME THAT MORNIN'?
"YOU'RE AN EXPERIMENT," HE SAID, "FOR MAKIN' FLESH IMMORTAL."
"IF WE SUCCEED, YOU'RE A FREE MAN. IF WE FAIL, YOU'RE DEAD. ANY LAST WORDS?"
WORDS? HELL, I WAS TONGUE-TIED. THIS BIG-SHOT SAMURAI TALKIN' CRAZY AS A LOON.
BUT TALK IS CHEAP.
I GOT ME A WIFE BACK HOME. A BIT SOFT IN THE HEAD.
PAL, YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT PROMISE, DO YOU?
'STEAD OF THE MONEY I NEVER SENT HER...
...MAYBE I CAN GIVE HER A BODY TOUGH AS YOURS.
WELL... GUESS I DO.
GUESS I GOT TO.

BOSS.
BOSS, THAT CARCASS OF YOURS IS THE REAL THING...
...MAYBE IT'S A MESSAGE, SEE? LIKE, YOUR SORRY ASS DON'T GET TO DIE...
A BODY WHAT WON'T DIE'S GOTTA BE ONE HELL OF A BURDEN, RIGHT? IF A GUY GETS A BODY LIKE THAT...
...THAT'D BE ONE FUCKED-UP WORLD.
...BUT IF THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT SPREADIN' IT LIKE MEASLES, MAKIN' A WORLD WHERE YOU DON'T NEED NO DOCTOR NOR PRIEST, WELL...
DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S BUDDHA TALKIN'. OR OLD ENMA HIMSELF.
...'CUZ THERE'S STILL SHIT YOU GOTTA DO.
DON'T THINK IMMORTALITY'D TAKE WITH ME.
ME, CAN'T PICTURE ANY LIFE 'CEPT THIS SLOPPY ONE I'M LIVIN'.
HER HEART'S AS STRAIGHT AS AN ARROW...
BUT MY OLD LADY, NOW. MAYBE HER.

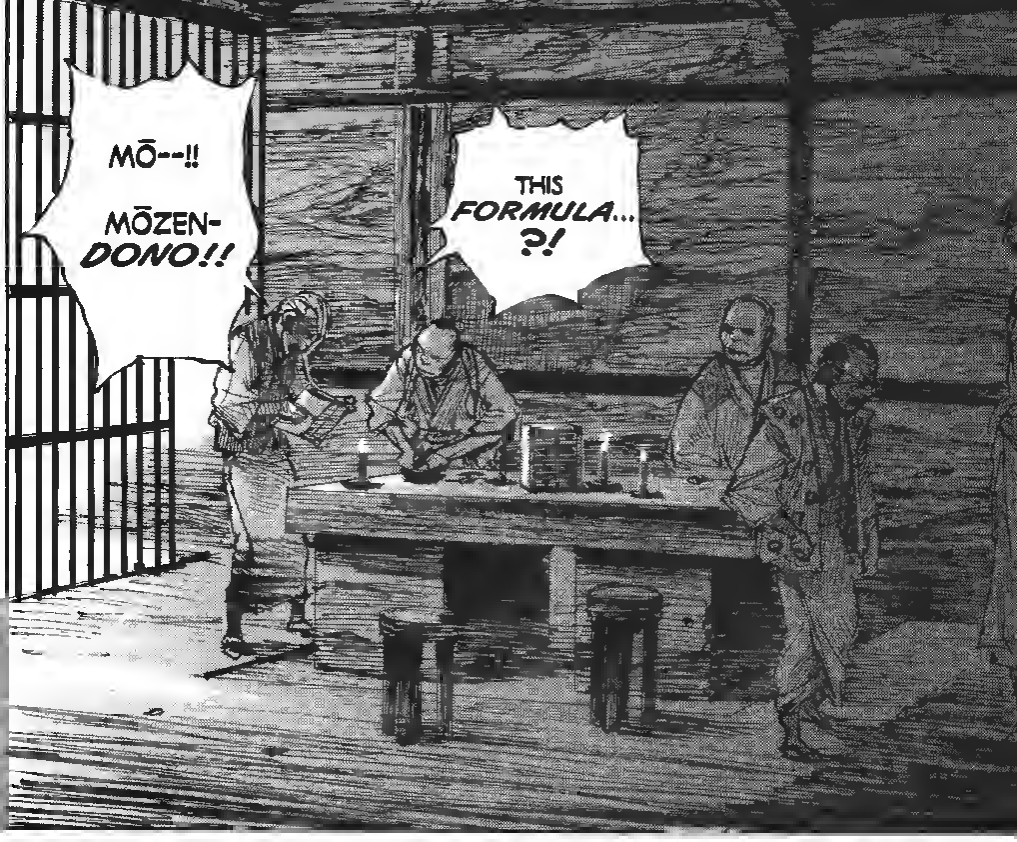

GYAH HAH HAHH!
GUESS A GOOD HEART'S GOT NOTHIN' TO DO WITH IT!

DAY FOUR...

YOU'RE LATE. HOW RARE.

MY SUPPLIES JUST ARRIVED.
SUPPLIES?
WELL.

TORA-EMON.
MIX THE QUANTITIES *EXACTLY* AS WRITTEN.
Y-YES, SIR!

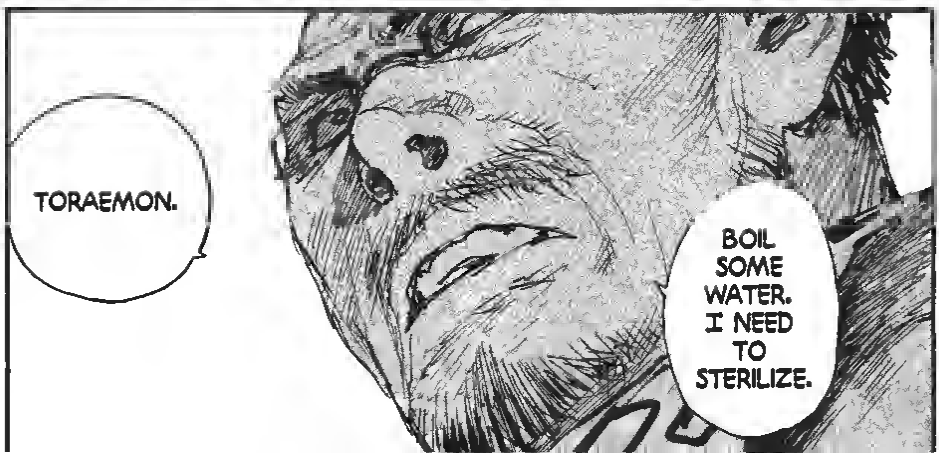

MŌ--!!
MŌZEN-DONO!!
THIS FORMULA...?!

SILENCE, BURANDO!

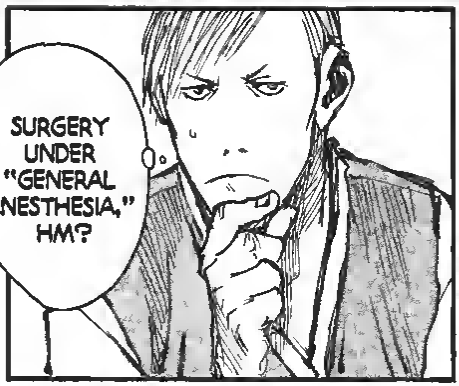
SMELLS LIKE SAKE.
YOU GONNA DRINK IT, BOSS?
HEY, IT WON'T KILL ME, RIGHT?
AFTER ALL, YOU AND ME...
...THEY GOTTA KEEP US ALIVE FOR LIKE A MONTH, GUARANTEED.
RIGHT, SAWBONES?
JUST DRINK IT!

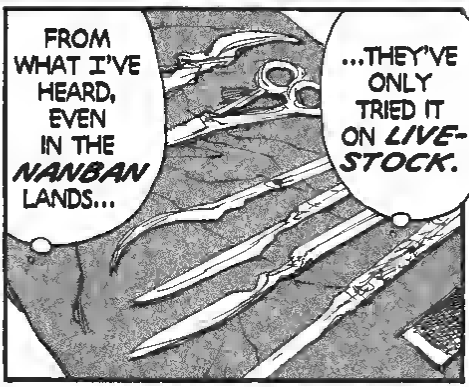
YES... IT WORKED.
DATURA METEL, ANGELICA DAHURICA, ANGELICA ACUTILOBA, ACONITUM JAPANICUM, ARISAEMA, CNIDIUM OFFICINALE...
BURANDO-*DONO*. WHAT IS THIS STUFF...?
I WAGER MŌZEN'S PLANNING...
GENERAL ANESTHE-SIA?!

...TO
VIVISECT
THAT
MAN
ALIVE!

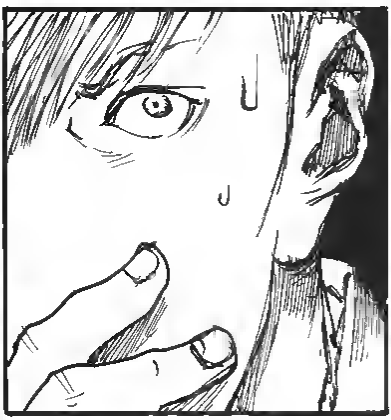

TORAEMON.
BOIL
SOME
WATER.
I NEED
TO
STERILIZE.

I SEE, I SEE...
YOU'RE BOLDER THAN I IMAGINED, MŌZEN.


SURGERY UNDER "GENERAL ANESTHESIA," HM?


FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, EVEN IN THE NANBAN LANDS...
...THEY'VE ONLY TRIED IT ON LIVESTOCK.

PERHAPS THIS IS A LITTLE... RASH?
IF HE DIES, BOTH OUR HEADS WILL ROLL...



MŌZEN-DONO. MY PARDON, BUT HOW MANY... VIVISECTIONS HAVE YOU PERFORMED?
OR SEEN?
MŌZEN-DONO!
THEY SAY THE ORGANS OF OTTERS RESEMBLE A MAN'S.
I'VE CUT OPEN THREE OF THEM.
I'M FINE.

OT--
OT--
OTTERS
?!
PEOPLE
ARE
PEOPLE!
MŌZEN!
STOP!!
I'M
BETTER
QUALIFIE--!

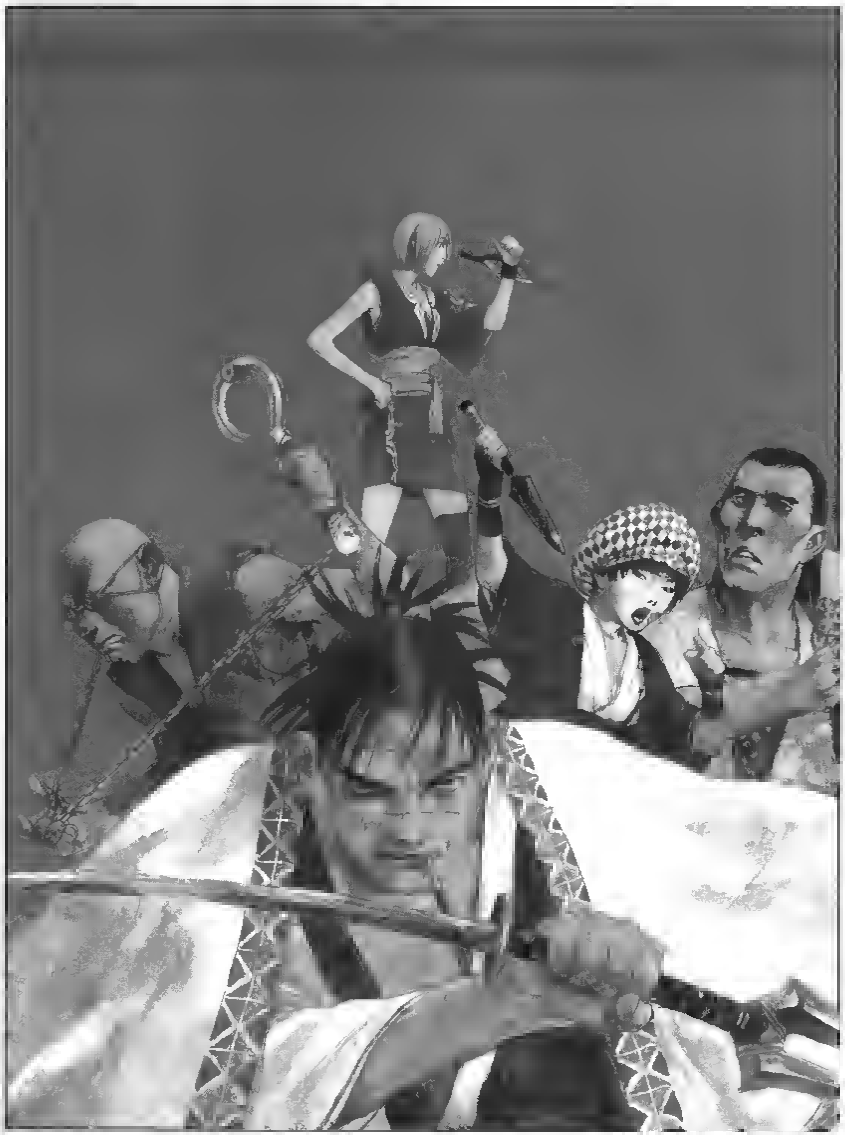
BUTT OUT, LITTLE BOY!!
.....
.....
.....
...NO!!

"WHY SO AMAZED, MŌZEN-DONO?
WHAT I TOLD YOU WHEN THEY PUBLISHED THE KAITAI SHINSHO?
HAVE YOU FORGOT-TEN, MŌZEN-DONO?
"SUGITA GENPAKU, HUMBUG!
"A MERE TRANSLA-TION OF A WESTERN TEXT, THAT'S ALL!
"...BUT EVEN THOSE ARE PATHETIC MOCKERIES, GUIDES BASED ON SINGLE DISSECTIONS.
"ZŌSHI AND KAISHIHEN ARE WORTH A GLANCE...
"WHITE MEN! BLACK MEN! FROM NEW-BORNS TO ANCIENTS! VIRGINS TO WHORES!!"
"NOW I, AYAME BURANDO! ON MY TRAVELS I CUT OPEN THIRTY-NINE CORPSES!

STEADY, BURANDO.
SEE IT FROM HIS SIDE... OF COURSE HE HAS TO DO THIS.
SHOULD HE LET YOU ASSIST HIM...
...EVEN IF HE SUCCEEDED BECAUSE OF IT AND DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF IMMORTALITY...
...HIS REPUTATION AS THE SHOGUN'S DOCTOR WOULD BE DRAGGED THROUGH THE MUD.
AND YET. AND YET!
IS THIS ANY TIME FOR THAT? THIS?!

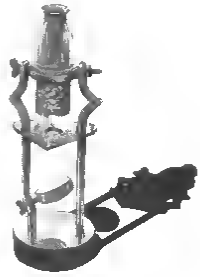
TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT MONTH:
SHORTCUT, Part 3 of 5



Drugged and helpless, Manji's unconscious body is a bloody plaything in Mōzen's hands! Kagimura's medical examiners are determined to tap into the secrets of the *kessen-chu*, the mystical bloodworms that heal Manji's wounds and grant him near-immortality. Horror, politics, and squabbling surgeons take center stage, as Hiroaki Samura leads us down another disturbing, gory pathway.

無限の住人



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All fan artwork, letters, and e-mails submitted become the property of Dark Horse Comics

Many thanks to Dustin Nguyen, who contributed the gorgeous Makie pinup that graces our back cover this month! Look for Dustin's work on The Authority: Revolution*–on the stands now! It'll mess with your head. See you in 2006, for another fine Nguyen pinup (he tackles Manji!) and the next twisted episode in Samura-dono's "Shortcut" story arc.*

—Philip

GLOSSARY

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Edo: Capitol of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Enma: The ruler of hell in Buddhist mythology.

Gama no Abura: "Toad oil," a famous folk cure made from toads and other animal parts. *Gama no Abura* was used to treat cuts and sword wounds. Usually applied locally, not swallowed.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kaishihen: Anatomy book from early Japanese medicine.

Kaitai Shinsho: *New Book of Anatomy*, translated by Sugita Genpaku (1733-1817), an early proponent of Western learning.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mugai-ryū: Criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets, literally, "without form."

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Nanban: Southern barbarians. Westerners were called this because their ships first reached Japan from the south and their manners were considered quite rude.

Ryū: A sword school.

Senso: Hardened toad lymph. In Chinese medicine, it is mixed into a powder and hardened.

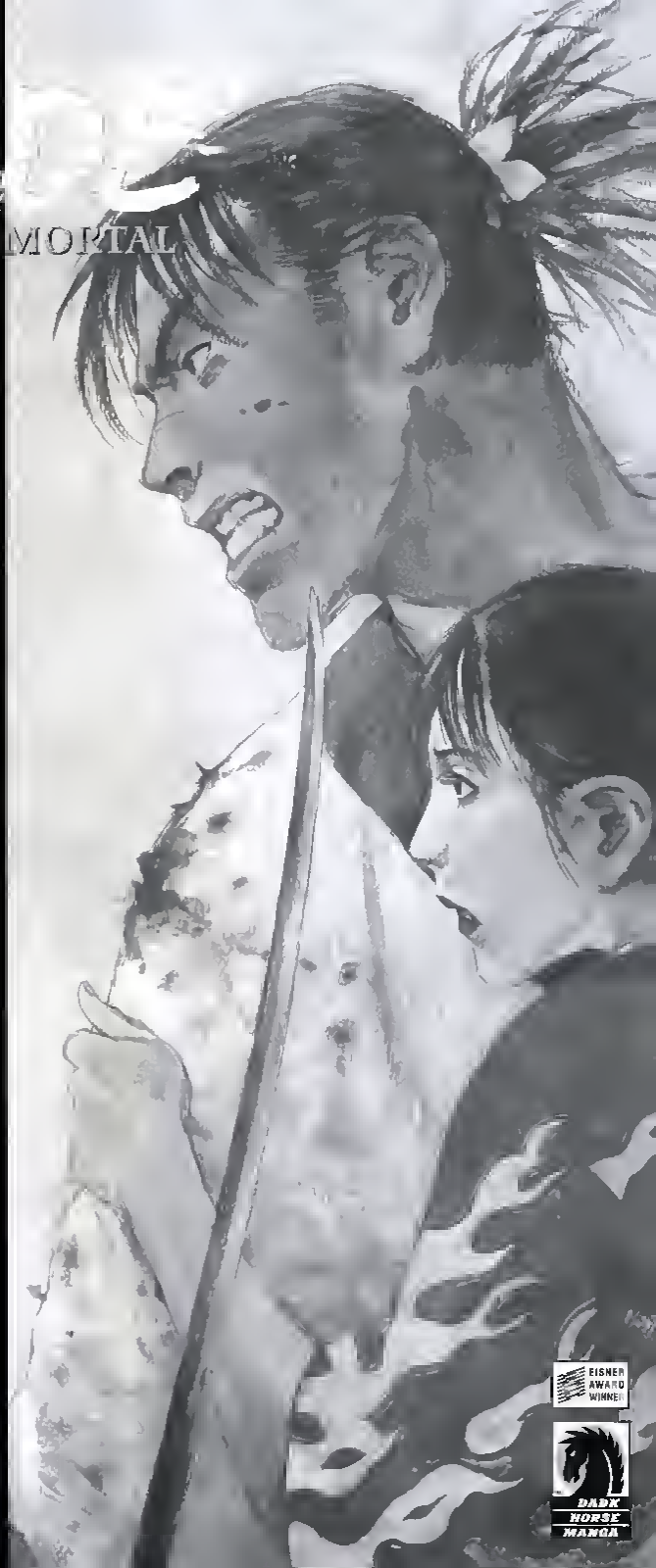
Zoshi: Anatomy guide published in 1770, based on the dissection of an executed convict. This and Kaishihen were the earliest anatomy books in Japan.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL



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EISNER AWARD WINNER!

DARK HORSE MANGA

Makie! Pinup by Dustin Nguyen

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BIG BLUE
2005